DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 119 042 CG 010 347

AUTHOR Mackenzie, Clara
TITLE Contingency Management and Student Motivation.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 7p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Class Management; *Contingency Management; Elementary Secondary Education; Learning Theories; *Performance Contracts; Positive Reinforcement; *Reinforcement; State of the Art Reviews; *Student Motivation; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Some educators are turning to the process of contingency management within a classroom as a short term, immediate motivator which can work for virtually every student, regardless of his/her final grade in the course. Contingency management consists of providing a set of alternatives from which those chosen by the student reward the students in some way for having undertaken extra or more difficult work. Contingency management has the additional advantage of helping lead students toward longer-range goal accomplishment and ultimate self-management, through successful attainment of a series of short-term goals. This paper discusses the use of contingency management, in a classroom, to provide motivation to students. (HMV)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED119042

CONTINGENCY MANAGEMENT AND STUDENT MOTIVATION

by
Dr. Clara Mackenzie
Assistant Director, Center for Effective Learning
Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio

Learning Reinforcement

"Well-organized subject matter leading to relevant objectives and with constructive feedback along the way, does more to counter apathy, indifference, or negativism than do efforts to attack motivation directly," says Stanford C. Erickson, (1) University of Michigan, in his new book Motivation for Learning.

Next to clear presentation, he believes, students' own self-esteem and search for identity as mature adults work more powerfully to motivate them than extrinsic lures or threats. Ordering of concepts and the satisfying of intellectual curiosity are among the oldest and best stimulants to learning, Erickson believes. Students' awareness that there is some social utility in what they are learning is equally stimulating.

In the actual classroom setting, however, short term incentives are often needed. There are a number of external reinforcements which an instructor can use to promote learning. Simple rewards can be used judiciously in the classroom to boost the learning rate of the less mature or less highly motivated student.

B. F. Skinner (2) was an early and important advocate of educational reinforcement. In The Technology of Teaching (1968) he discusses the problems of cane or carrot reinforcers, and comes out on the side of the carrot as preferred in setting the conditions of learning. Programmed learning utilizes

CG 010 347

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

this principle to give immediate positive feedback, constantly reinforcing the correct responses.

One problem with instant positive reinforcement, however, is the likelihood that the learner will become bored or dependent upon the rewards. Ever more powerful rewards and stimulants may have to be added to combat the monotony of routine and the disinclination to work. Once the student becomes too dependent on the reward for effort, there is little recourse except to begin using the cane instead of the carrot.

The traditional institutional learning reinforcers--grades, prizes, and diplomas--have retained much, but not all, of their ability to motivate. Yet, as Skinner points out, we cannot give everyone prizes and as the Bell curve implies, we obviously cannot give favorable grades to all as a reward.

Contingency Management

Some educators are turning to the process of management of contingencies within a class as short term, immediate motivators which can work for virtually every student, regardless of his/her final grade in the course.

Contingency management consists of providing a set of alternatives which, when chosen by the student, serve to reward his efforts in some way for having undertaken extra or more difficult work. Contingency management has the additional advantage of helping lead students toward longer range goal accomplishment and ultimate self-management, through successful attainment of a series of short term goals.

Under this form of class management, reinforcement can come through several means. First, reinforcement can come from the instructional materials themselves; for example, offering a choice between reading and audio-visuals, or between library study and field trips (although a recent experiment (3) showed that field trips were often not chosen because of students' full schedules).

The use of an alternative strategy may be no more effective in terms of total learning, yet the over-all effect is one of lending variety to regular classroom schedules and of giving students a choice, both of which encourage a favorable attitude toward learning.

Reinforcement may also come from the personality of the instructor who serves as a good role model for the student of a competent adult, citizen, parent, and scholar. If in addition, the instructor possesses a warm and empathetic personality to which students feel free to respond, then winning the instructor's approval is strong reinforcement in itself.

Being right is of course an excellent reinforcement, particularly if being right is acknowledged before one's peers. Positive verbal reinforcement in conversation or question and answer interchange builds students' self-esteem.

Step-wise learning has built-in reinforcement value. For example, PSI and other individualized courses have built into them incremental progression with mastery required at each level. Passing one quiz is the ticket of admission to the next step in learning in such a self-paced program.

Another group of classroom contingency management strategies (3) offer the student such rewards as the remission of a low grade or the option to be graded on the three highest test scores, or even the option to miss the final if certain learning conditions are met. These short term rewards give incentive to do extra reading or undertake difficult independent study options, or gain extra points in a grading system which allows for accumulations of points toward a final grade.

Contingency management has been defined by Baker (1971) as "the control of circumstances so that specified consequencies are made dependent upon the execution of specific desired behaviors." Baker (4) suggests that a way to use contingency management is to space activities considered to be pleasurable

or rewarding so that they immediately follow difficult learning tasks. Ideally the rewards are made contingent upon performance of a specific behavior.

It should be made clear to the learner that under given conditions, if certain tasks are accomplished, a desired reward will be forthcoming. The student "buys" the reward with the labor and effort that the instructor desires.

In order for this sequence to take place, the instructor must specify the desired outcome in terms of clear expectations. A series of consequent events, a "rewards" list, must be drawn up. Scheduling of events must take place so that the continuity of instruction is not interrupted. Finally, the contingency must be monitoried to insure that all the instructional steps were followed and the reward properly earned.

Contingency management, in effect, produces a series of mini-contracts requiring the learner to exhibit certain behavior or accomplish certain tasks. The reward should, obviously, be commensurate with the degree of difficulty of the task. The contract should be clear, fair, and honest. Baker gives the following example:

> An outline distributed on the first day of class explained that, in order to receive an A, twenty units of work must be completed and that a test of each unit must be passed with no more than one error before a student could go on to the next unit. Seventeen units must be completed for a B, fourteen for a C, and eleven for a D. Any fewer merited an F. The student could pace himself and take tests at any time. His grade would therefore be determined by his own effort expenditure. (This contract meets the three criteria. It is clear, honest, and fair, and is therefore a well-defined statement of a contingency.) (Baker, p. 217.)

Consequent events should be carefully selected with a particular student population in mind. They should follow immediately after the learning task; delayed events have a weaker effect upon behavior.

Contingency management has been shown to reinforce learning among students at every level provided: 1) the "contract" is suited to the learner population; 2) is stated in a clear, fair, and honest manner; 3) consequent events follow closely upon the learning task; they also work well if they 4) are built into the learning task through step-wise progression.

In general, positive learning reinforcement works better than punishment, especially where the management of events can capitalize on the students' desire to be right, to enhance self-esteem, and to win approval of the instructor and their peers.

REFERENCES

1. Erickson, Stanford C. Motivation for Learning: A Guide for the Teacher of the Young Adult. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1974.

2. Skinner, B. F. The Technology of Teaching. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts Educational Division, Meredith Corporation, 1968.

3. Komaki, Judi. "Neglected Reinforcers in the College Classroom." Journal of Higher Education, (Jan./Feb., 1975), pp. 63-74.

4. Baker, Robert L. and Richard E. Schutz, (eds.). Instructional Product Development. New York: Van Nostrand Reinholdt Company, 1971.